

Fight brewing over proposed 24% sewage rate increase

By TOM LONERGAN

A 24 percent increase in sewage treatment rates, effective July 1, has been proposed for most southern Oakland and western Wayne County communities by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD).

Suburban Wayne County is expected to fight it. The new rates include charges for an estimated \$19.5 million in repairs to a cracked Macomb County sewer which nearly collapsed a year ago.

The wholesale rate for most cities in south Oakland and western Wayne would increase from \$3.40 per 1,000 cubic feet of water to \$4.23. The increase is usually passed on to residential customers. In addition, counties and communities may add service charges.

An additional 10 cents per 1,000 cubic feet is included in the new wholesale rates for DWSD's 75 suburban community sewage treatment customers and the city of Detroit. The added charge may be assessed during the next 30 years, the time DWSD estimates it will take to pay off revenue bonds that will be sold to raise the repair funds.

IN SOUTH OAKLAND County, the new rates will likely add at least \$10-\$13 annually to a homeowner's water bill, according to Donald Ringler of the county Department of Public Works. His estimate is based on households which use from 12,000-16,000 cubic feet of water a year for sewage.

In western Wayne County, the increase could range from \$16-\$30 annually, according to a DPW official.

lion people in the three-county metropolitan area.

Breen said Oakland and Macomb officials "made a political deal with Detroit" to have the repairs for last year's sewer line break charged system wide.

The bulk of a \$15 million repair bill from a July 1978 sewer line collapse, also in Macomb County, was charged only to Macomb users as part of rates that took effect in January 1980.

OAKLAND COUNTY Drain Commissioner George Kuhn was out of the state this week and couldn't be reached for comment. But DWSD Director Charles Beckham denied a deal was made between city and suburban officials on the sewer repair bill.

"If you can imagine myself, George Kuhn and (Macomb Public Works Com-

The Wayne County DPW objects to the systemwide added charge for last year's sewer mishap in Sterling Heights . . . 'We see no reason why communities outside (northeastern Oakland and western Macomb counties, the areas affected by the break) should pay.'

— John Breen,
Wayne DPW attorney

missioner) Tom Welsh making a deal, that amounts to pretty good fiction," Beckham said. Kuhn and Welsh have been the most outspoken suburban critics of DWSD.

Beckham said the systemwide charges for last year's near-sewer line collapse is a new policy adopted by the water board in December. He said the 1978 sewer break was due to man-

made causes, so was charged primarily to Macomb, while the latest damage was due to natural causes as determined by an Army Corps of Engineers investigation.

"This (added charge) is basically creating an insurance policy, and everyone should bear the cost of that," Beckham said.

The new rates, he said, will raise \$144 million for the 1981-82 fiscal year which begins July 1. The proposed increases, developed by DWSD's rate consultant, Camp, Dresser & McKee, will account for \$24.7 million in new revenue.

Beckham said the new rates are due to inflation and federally mandated improvements to the sewage plant.

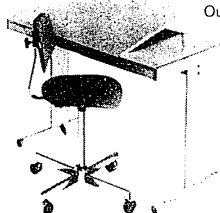
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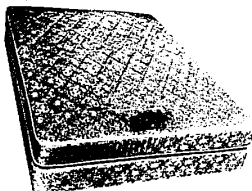
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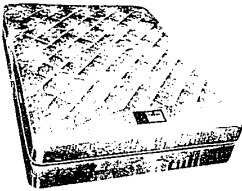
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